

Prescription Legibility Law:

The Tennessee General Assembly enacted Public Chapter 678 entitled the “Medication Error Reduction Act of 2004.” This law amends several sections of Tennessee Code Annotated with the intent to “create a uniform standard that health care providers must follow in issuing written or electronic prescription orders” in an effort “to reduce medication related errors.” The law states that any written or electronic order for a drug prepared by any authorized prescriber (physician, podiatrist, dentist, etc.) “must be legibly printed or typed so that it is comprehensible by the pharmacist who fills the prescription.” The prescription order must contain the following:

1. The name of the prescriber;
2. The name and strength of the drug prescribed;
3. The quantity of the drug prescribed written in both letters **and** numerals;
4. Instructions for proper use of the drug;
5. The month and day that the prescription was issued written in letters **or** numerals; and
6. The prescriber must sign the written or electronic order on the day that it was issued.

FAQs:

Q: What are pharmacists obligated to do under this law?

A: A pharmacist may not dispense medication pursuant to a written or electronic order issued by a prescriber in the State of Tennessee unless the order is “legibly printed or typed so that it is comprehensible to the pharmacist”. This does not prohibit a pharmacist from dispensing medication pursuant to a verbal prescription order. Also a pharmacist is required to contact the prescriber to seek clarification of a written prescription order that is not comprehensible to the pharmacist and the pharmacist shall not dispense the medication until clarification is obtained.

Q: Does this legibility mandate apply to medication orders issued in an institutional facility?

A: Yes. The new law mandating legibility applies to “written or electronic orders” for a drug prepared by a person who is allowed by law to prescribe medication. The law does not limit or

specify the types of orders that must be legible; therefore, it must apply to all written or electronic orders for a drug prepared by a prescriber.

Q: Can a pharmacist accept a cursive style signature by the prescriber on the prescription order?

A: Yes. However, this does not relieve the pharmacist of his or her obligation to contact the prescriber if the pharmacist questions the legitimacy of the signature and therefore the legitimacy of the prescription order.

Q: How will this law be enforced by the Board of Pharmacy?

A: The Board of Pharmacy could use a pharmacist's failure to abide by this law as a basis for disciplining that pharmacist's license. One of the applicable disciplinary sections is Tennessee Code Annotated §63-10-505 (4) which states that the Board has the authority to place on probation, suspend, revoke, or refuse to issue or renew any license and/or impose a civil penalty if a licensee engages in "conduct prohibited or made unlawful by any of the provisions of parts 4-6 of this chapter, or any other laws of the state or of the United States relating to drugs or to the practice of pharmacy."